

## *Suffrage and Elections*

### LOWERING THE MINIMUM VOTING AGE TO 18 YEARS\*

#### PRO AND CON ARGUMENTS

##### I. BACKGROUND

Under the Constitution it is the prerogative of the states, within certain limitations, to establish qualifications for voting. This includes minimum voting age. With few exceptions, a minimum of 21 years has been standard practice in this country since colonial times. Most nations of Western Europe also have a minimum voting-age requirement of 21 years, but in several it is appreciably higher—for example, in the Netherlands 23 years, in Denmark 25 years for the *Folksting* and 35 for the *Landsting*, and in Italy 21 years for the Chamber and 25 years for the Senate. Of the seventeen countries which have reduced the minimum voting age to 18, eight are in Latin America, and eight are communist countries. The other one is Israel.

Particularly since World War I, a number of attempts have been made to lower the minimum voting age to 18, in

some instances through a federal constitutional amendment, and in others through amendments to state election codes by action of state legislatures. In only two states, Georgia and Kentucky, has the reduction been accomplished. Georgia lowered the minimum-age qualification for voting to 18 in 1943, Kentucky in 1955. (In Alaska the minimum age is 19; in Hawaii it is 20.)

One of the early (1953) constitutional amendments proposed in the United States Senate read as follows:<sup>1</sup>

“Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United

<sup>1</sup> SENATE COMM. ON THE JUDICIARY, HEARINGS WITH RESPECT TO GRANTING CITIZENS WHO HAVE ATTAINED THE AGE OF EIGHTEEN THE RIGHT TO VOTE. 83d Cong. 1st Sess. 1-2 (1952). S. J. Res. 53 was rejected by the Senate on May 21, 1954, after debate on the measure, by 34 yeas to 24 nays (a two-thirds affirmative vote being necessary for adoption of a proposal for a constitutional amendment).

*Hearings on S. J. Res. 53 Before the Standing Subcomm. on Constitutional Amendments of the Senate Comm. on the Judiciary*, 83d Cong., 1st Sess. 1-2.

\* This article was written for The Library of Congress Legislative Reference Service by Doris W. Jones, History and Government Division, June 8, 1956.